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SUBJECT: BASRAH MOD ADVISOR SAYS IRAN TRAINING JAM FOR PROXY WAR

REF: A. BASRAH 86 B. BASRAH 88

CLASSIFIED BY: Howell Howard, A/Director, Regional Embassy
Office - Basrah, Department of State.
REASON: 1.4 (a), (b), (c), (d)

¶1. (S) Summary: MOD Advisor Majid al-Sari told REO September 23 that Iran was now hosting training for 3,000 Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM) members on collecting intelligence, radio intercepts, and employing EFPs and snipers for operations in Basrah. According to al-Sari, Tehran was secretly behind a September 25-27 conference in Iran to showcase closer ties to Basrah, and wants to make Basrah a proxy Iranian province. Basrah's security situation was worsening because unfettered militias were expanding their influence. Iraqi security forces (ISF), even with reinforcements, would not be effective; what was needed were either covert ISF operations or support to nationalist-JAM. End Summary.

¶2. (S) Basrah-based Iraq Ministry of Defense Advisor Majid al-Sari confirmed earlier reporting (ref A) to Regional Embassy Officers September 23 that Iran was training Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM) members within Iran to learn how to collect intelligence, use radio intercept equipment, and employ EFPs and sniper teams to wreak havoc in Basrah. He put the number of trainees at 3,000 while Police Chief Major General Jalil Khalaf Shueil previously told us 300-350. Ayatollah Sistani representative, Al-Mehdi Battat, and Thar Allah leader, Sayyid Youssef (currently in Iran), were al-Sari's sources for this information.

¶3. (S) Al-Sari also told us that Tehran was secretly behind a September 25-27 conference in Ahvaz (aka al-Hawaz), Iran to show the USG that Iran has closer ties to Basrah. According to al-Sari, Iran's ultimate goal is to make Basrah the capital of a proxy Iranian province run by the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq. The conference, ostensibly to break the Ramadan fast, will rename the Saddam Hussein-titled "Week of the Martyrs" - in honor of the Iran-Iraq War - as the "Week of Iraq-Iran Brotherhood." The Imam of the Al-Ahwaz mosque extended invitations to al-Sari, as well as Basrawi clerics and leaders of JAM, Badr Organization, Thar Allah, Al-Shaheed al-Mihrab, 15 of Shabban and Sayyid al-Shuhada. Note: The same week is called the "Week of the Sacred Defense" in Iran.

¶4. (S/NF) He also told us that Basrah's security situation was worsening because the militias, unencumbered by Coalition or police opposition, were expanding their influence (ref B). He dismissed "legal" solutions because law enforcement was too

corrupt, ill suited, or too scared to confront the militias. British plans to separate national and Iranian-influenced JAM would also fail because those supported by Iran are too powerful. He was also skeptical that the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) in Basrah, though recently reinforced, could tackle the militias for lack of firepower. Even if the ISF were capable, he doubted MND-SE would allow such operations for fear that it would prolong the UK's presence in Iraq. However, he said, the "ceasefire deal" is between JAM and MND-SE and should not preclude ISF operations.

15. (S) What was needed, he opined, were "dirty, secretive, Contra-like" operations using either the ISF or through support to nationalist-JAM. If the latter, it would have to be well thought out to ensure Coalition deniability and in such a way that once the nationalists were strengthened, they did not turn on the Coalition.

HOWARD